

**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION**

TO: DCF Staff

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SUBJECT: Resources to Help Families Cope with Disaster

As we continue to recover from Hurricane Sandy, it is important to recognize that this is a stressful and frightening time for not only DCF involved children and families, but also for ourselves and our own family and friends. While a number of valuable resources exist that can be helpful for parents and children coping with disasters, I wanted to share a few resources in particular with you that will assist you in supporting the needs of DCF children, youth, and families as well as your own.

First, here are a few key points to keep in mind when working with families suffering from the effects of Hurricane Sandy:

- Create an environment of attention and concern so that your children feel that they can ask questions or express their fears.
- When discussing Hurricane Sandy and its effects with children/youth, parents and caregivers should be clear, honest, and reassuring in language appropriate to the child's age and developmental stage. Don't minimize their fears and don't promise what you cannot deliver.
- Calm parents and caregivers are essential. It's important that parents use healthy coping mechanisms to get through this difficult time. Parents and caregivers can model healthy behaviors such as reaching out when help is needed, taking a break to calm down, and focusing on family.
- Let kids be kids. While parents are working through the disaster and planning, children should still be allowed to play and carry on in as normal of a fashion as possible.
- Keep an eye on any new developments with your children and youth. If a child for example begins to have recurrent stomach aches or nightmares, you should seek appropriate professional help.

The following resources will help to reinforce these points and provide you with additional information:

- *The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry's Disaster Resource Center* – this website provides an overview of children's reactions to disasters, how to talk with children about a disaster, and when to be concerned about a child's response, including potential signs of PTSD in children.
<http://www.aacap.org/cs/DisasterTrauma.ResourceCenter>
- *Talking to Children about Earthquakes and other Natural Disasters*—this list provides suggestions for how to talk to children about natural disasters.
<http://www.aacap.org/galleries/default-file/TalkingtoKids.Earthquakes.NaturalDisasters.3.11.2011.pdf>
- *Recovery After a Hurricane*—this is a good basic overall resource for parents and caregivers about hurricanes, their impact on children and families, what parents, teachers and others can do to help children cope with hurricanes, as well as activities for children and adolescents. Please see the additional *Description*, *Readiness*, and *Response* tabs for additional information.
<http://nctsn.org/trauma-types/natural-disasters/hurricanes#tabset-tab-5>
- *The National Child Traumatic Stress Network Manual of Psychological First Aid: Appendix E*—this particular appendix consists of a series of handouts that cover possible adult reactions to disasters and inappropriate/appropriate coping mechanisms, parenting tips for helping specific age groups cope with disaster, and tips for adults regarding drug and alcohol use and relaxation in confronting disaster.
<http://www.nctsn.org/content/psychological-first-aid>

In times like these, we all appreciate the value of supporting one another. In that spirit, if you need assistance or are facing a challenging situation, please do not hesitate to reach out to your peers or supervisor.

Lastly, the resources listed above are not intended to be a substitute for mental health or other professional services. If you or someone you know needs help or has developed unhealthy coping mechanisms, please help them to seek appropriate services.